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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL IS

SUBJECT: S/P GORDON'S MEETINGS WITH PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In meetings on May 31 and June 2, Palestinian interlocutors briefed S/P David Gordon on Palestinian attitudes toward negotiations with Israel and domestic politics in the West Bank and Gaza. Sari Nusseibeh said leaders on both sides could improve their political standing by coming to an agreement. Ghassan al-Khatib said Palestinians are losing hope because they see no change on the ground. Riad al-Malki discussed PA efforts to improve its public image and define a culture of citizenship in the West Bank. End Summary.

SARI NUSSEIBEH: ABBAS AND OLMERT NEED A DEAL

¶2. (C) During a meeting with S/P David Gordon on May 31, al-Quds University President Sari Nusseibeh said President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and PM Olmert could both benefit from a "one-on-one agreement that defines the endgame." However, he questioned whether they were capable of crafting a document that both could agree to. Nusseibeh said an agreement could serve as a political platform for Abbas going into new elections that would unify Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and decrease support for Hamas. He said an agreement would strengthen Olmert and both leaders could turn from "political midgets to political giants." New elections on either side without an agreement will spell the end of both governments and prospects for progress, Nusseibeh said. According to Nusseibeh, Olmert told him Abbas uses his inadequate English as an excuse to include Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat in their meetings, which prevents the two leaders from making tough decisions without scrutiny.

GHASSAN AL-KHATIB: PALESTINIANS NEED TO SEE CHANGE

¶3. (C) On June 2, Director of Jerusalem Media and Communications Center Ghassan al-Khatib told Gordon that polls indicated an increase in Palestinian support for peace during the Annapolis conference, but three factors led to a decline in support in 2008. First, the failure to achieve steps towards peace discouraged Palestinians. Second, unemployment and poverty increased radicalization. Third, the increase in regional radicalism affected Palestinians. He said Abbas seemed "pessimistic to a critical extent" and assessed that Abbas feels powerless to effect change in Fatah or the PLO. Al-Khatib cited settlement expansion as the primary reason Palestinians believe negotiations are not successful. Regarding elections, al-Khatib said Fatah's success in recent university polls is a positive sign, but the faction needs to elect new leadership before it can return to power.

RIAD AL-MALKI: PUBLIC IMAGE CAMPAIGN CAN IMPROVE PA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE

¶4. (C) PA Foreign Minister Riad al-Malki told Gordon on June 2 that Palestinians' priorities are first to stop settlement expansion and second to improve access and movement in the West Bank. There is a fundamental lack of trust in this conflict, he said. Al-Malki said the PA is not being allowed to demonstrate the effectiveness of moderate leadership and charged that the Israelis prefer Hamas because radical groups give them the excuse to act as they want in the name of security. The PA has improved the economy and security in the West Bank, but requires Israeli cooperation to make further improvements, he said. Al-Malki said the PA has had some success improving its public image in spite of limited resources and lack of experience. He said the PA is using billboards, pamphlets, e-mail, text messages, town hall meetings, and radio broadcasts to highlight PA successes. As part of this campaign, he said, PM Fayyad has visited West Bank towns, and al-Malki said Palestinians are becoming more receptive. He discussed the need to develop a Palestinian definition and culture of the "citizen" and improve relations between the PA and the people.

¶5. (U) S/P Gordon's office cleared on this cable.

WALLES